

Blackwork Journey Blog - October 2013

October 2013

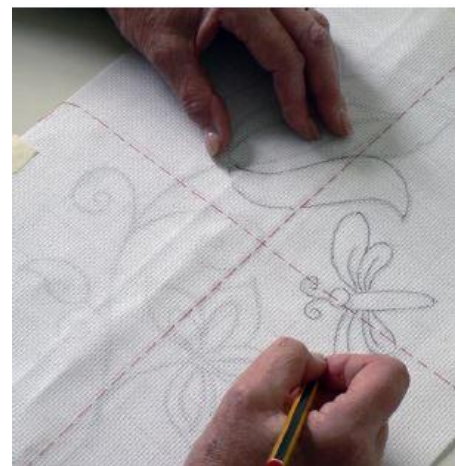
Over the past few weeks I have been doing a number of talks and days schools about different aspects of embroidery and have been very heartened by the enthusiasm and dedication of the needlewomen I have met. It is all too easy to write off needlework as "just a hobby" or something to "pass the time" but for many women their needlework has a far more important role in their lives and in some cases, it is literally a "life saver".

For example, needlework can have a serious part to play in pain management, where the exercise of arthritic fingers and swollen joints, along with the ability to lose oneself in a therapeutic process and forget the mental and physical pressures that are imposed on each and every one of us in an ever pressurised society can be very worthwhile. For example, stitching a piece of blackwork, or making a baby quilt requires concentration which often means sitting quietly and taking time out! This is something many women feel guilty about, but there is a real need to have a recharging period and a little "me" time!

A number of readers have shared their thoughts with me on this aspect of their lives and the overwhelming and positive changes it has made to them as individuals and how they are perceived within their families. Loss of confidence as one grows older and retirement approaches is a very common feeling and the very positive impact of creating and finishing something practical should not be underestimated.



Day schools are fun and for me, run on coffee!





Passing on our skills to the next generation, whether it is cooking or needlework, gardening or other talents is part of our role and there is ample evidence that the work of volunteers with groups of young people such as Brownies, Guides, Scouts and church groups can have a very positive impact, as well as reinforcing the value of the volunteers themselves.

The dedicated women, who voluntarily run the embroidery and quilting groups around the world, spend considerable amounts of their own time in supporting their members and must be applauded. They enrich the lives of so many people with their hard work and their

impact is more extensive than they may realise. Communities need networks within them and without the volunteers the whole of society is poorer.

Pulled work in colour!

Pulled work is a counted thread technique and is distinct from drawn thread work in that NO threads are removed. The patterns are created by pulling or drawing the threads together with a matching or contrasting thread.

Stitches:

The basic pulled thread embroidery stitches are:

Wave stitch

Four sided stitch

Satin stitch worked as groups or spaced

Upright cross stitch, which is usually worked in diagonal rows

Back stitch

Faggot stitch

Eyelets

Greek cross

Three sided stitch

Many other stitches are used within the technique, but mastering the above will give you the confidence to attempt more difficult projects. All of the stitches take practice to determine which threads and fabric are most suited to your personal requirements, so keep a piece of fabric handy to try out any new stitches!

Stitching pulled work is also very satisfying, but working on light coloured material with light coloured threads may prove an eyesight challenge, so I have been experimenting with working pulled work in colour and whilst it does move away from the traditional aspect of this technique, it was much easier to work.

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PR0019 Maple Leaf Wreath (see below) was worked in DMC Cotton P rle No.12 in a dusky rose colour on an ecru coloured evenweave fabric, but it could equally have been embroidered with cream thread on cream fabric or white on white. I used a 28 count evenweave so I could see the threads clearly with a magnifying light/lens. Good lighting is essential for any form of counted thread embroidery and especially when working white on white.



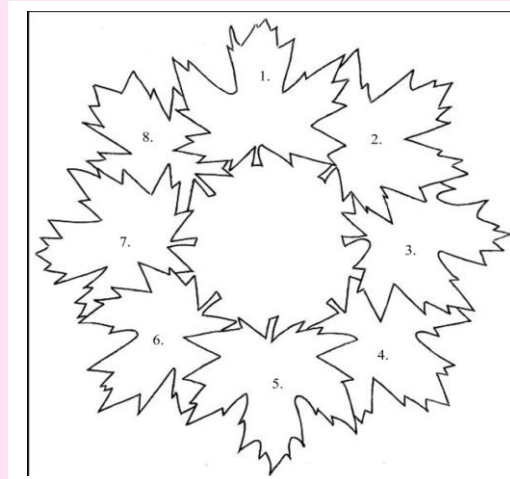
The pattern was drawn onto the fabric using a blue water-soluble pen to create a clear outline which could later be removed by dipping it in cold water.

PR0019 Maple Leaf Wreath

Each of the eight sections contained a different pulled thread pattern. Three of the patterns are denser than the others to provide a contrast, but with this type of work and blackwork, it is important that a balance is achieved between the light and the dark patterns. If two dark patterns are placed close together it can distort the whole design. The back stitch outline around each leaf helps to define the different shapes more clearly and the outline is whipped with the Cotton P rle No.12 to produce a cord effect.

PR0019 is worked in pulled work stitches but it could equally be worked in blackwork!

Look to see how designs can be used in different ways.



Coffee!!

Coffee plays an important role in my life from first thing in the morning until the last one at night and NOT decaffeinated! I do not function without coffee and when you think about it, coffee plays a vital role in almost every aspect of our social life. People do business, socialise and work with coffee. I understand that it is the second most popular drink next to water and the second most widely used product next to oil and as I suspect many of you know day schools run on coffee!



CH0317 Coffee and Cream and CH0318 Coffee Mocha - two designs to tempt your senses!

Coffee is held in such high esteem in the United Arab Emirates that there are enormous ornamental coffee pots (dallah) on the streets and in Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Dubai. Coffee pots even feature on some of their coins!

Arabic coffee is bought at the roasters nuts and spices, either in a souk or at a large supermarket or shopping mall.

Normally, there are four types of roast beans available: Dark and Medium Turkish, Gulf Khaleeji or very light Saudi. In the Gulf States coffee is served in a small delicate cup called a finjaan which is held with the right hand. The cup is filled half full and to be polite, the guest should accept at least one cup and sometimes three!



ARABIC COFFEE

Ingredients:

3 cups water

3 tablespoons Arabic coffee, coarsely ground

1 tablespoon cardamom (optional)

5-6 whole cloves, small pinch saffron, 1 teaspoon rose water (optional)

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Method:

1. Bring water to boil in a dallah or a medium saucepan.
2. When the water boils, add the ground coffee. Boil for 10 to 12 minutes.
3. Add crushed cardamom and cloves. Stir and boil for another 5 minutes.
4. Pre-heat a coffee jug with boiling water.
5. Remove coffee pot from heat, cover and let coffee grounds settle to the bottom.
6. Add the rose water and small pinch of saffron to the empty jug. Strain and pour the steaming coffee into the jug.

So as you can see, coffee has influenced my life so the two coffee embroideries I have designed and stitched are quite in order!

Happy stitching!

Liz